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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 003164

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [EG](#) [MEPI](#) [USG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN MEDIA CAMPAIGN AGAINST USG ASSISTANCE
PRIMARILY TARGETS THE GOVERNMENT

REF: A. CAIRO 2990

[1](#)B. CAIRO 2877

[1](#)C. CAIRO 2524

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: There has been a marked increase recently in negative Egyptian media commentary concerning USG assistance to Egypt, with opposition daily Al-Wafd (circulation: 200,000) leading the charge. Critical commentaries and articles have consistently portrayed USG assistance as 'interference' in Egypt's domestic affairs and a 'threat' to Egypt's sovereignty. Al-Wafd's vociferous campaign against USAID has gone so far as to urge the GOE to forgo accepting any USAID assistance. Commentary in the independent and pro-government press has criticized MEPI grants as well. Much of this criticism represents an attempt by the opposition to put Mubarak's government on the defensive. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The banner headline of Al-Wafd's Sunday, March 20, edition read "No to American Aid: Politicians and Economic Experts Support Al-Wafd Party Chairman's Call." In the same edition, a cartoon depicted a foot labeled "Egyptian [political] parties" kicking an Uncle Sam-like figure with a cowboy hat and moneybag, labeled "foreign interference." The newspaper highlighted calls by Al-Wafd party Chairman Dr. No'man Gomaa for the GOE to refuse further USAID assistance, because, in Gomaa's words: "such funding brings disgrace to Egypt's sovereignty and independence." Articles and commentaries published in Al-Wafd later that week also alleged:

-- The majority of USAID assistance "reverts back to America, along with the dignity of the Egyptian people";

-- "U.S. assistance promotes negative attitudes and imports foreign concepts that promote America's regional ambitions"; and

-- "The ruling National Democratic Party [NDP] cannot live without this humiliating 'assistance.' While the NDP claims mutual interests, America only understands power and personal interests."

[1](#)3. (U) On April 10, privately-owned Arab Regional Television (ART) aired a two-hour program, Hanat Al-Yak ("You're Cornered"), which discussed USAID assistance to Egypt. (Note: This program is produced and hosted by Iman No'man Gomaa, daughter of Al-Wafd party Chairman Gomaa. End note.) Two speakers critical of USG assistance appeared, along with one speaker in support. While the pro-USAID speaker highlighted specific examples where it has improved the lives of ordinary Egyptians, the program's host incorrectly represented USAID's work. For example, she stated that 26,000 U.S. experts and 22,000 U.S. consultants are hired in Egypt to work on USAID projects. She also gave air time to several callers arguing that USG assistance is a "pressure tool" and "a threat to Egypt's sovereignty."

[1](#)4. (U) Commentaries critical of USG assistance have also appeared in independent papers Al-Masri Al-Youm (circulation: 20,000) and Nahdet Masr (circulation: 20,000), and the opposition weekly Al-Araby (circulation: 20,000). A March 18 profile about USAID assistance and MEPI grants in the nationalist magazine Rose El-Youssef (circulation: 70,000) quoted a reputed Cairo intellectual saying: "It is no secret that the grant process will open the door to suspicious organizations and imposters. These funds could then be used to influence the will of Egyptian voters and cast a long shadow on the funding of Egypt's election campaigns."

[1](#)5. (SBU) Comment: While the recent Egyptian media criticism of USAID assistance has often pointed to then-Ambassador Welch's March 3 grant signing ceremony at the Embassy (ref C), the real target is the GOE. When President Mubarak took away the opposition's thunder by supporting an amendment to Article 76 of the constitution, allowing political parties to take part in this year's presidential election, the opposition looked for a new issue and found it by portraying the GOE as beholden to USG

assistance. (Note: The GOE itself may have recently employed similar tactics against the Muslim Brotherhood, seeking to discredit it by accusing it of being in dialogue with the USG -- refs A and B. End note.) The recent media criticism appears mainly to serve the opposition as a means to discredit the Mubarak regime and probably does not reflect major popular support against USG assistance. End comment.

CORBIN